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SUBJECT: SPLA COS ON INTRA-SPLM TENSIONS AND RELATIONS WITH
MISSERIYA

¶1. (SBU) CDA Fernandez and Acting CG met with SPLA Chief of Staff LTG Oyai Deng Ajak on May 9. They discussed recent Misseriya/SPLA tensions within Sudan's oil-field region along the 1956 border, SPLA difficulties integrating a sometimes fickle Misseriya force, and Unity's State Governor Taban Deng Gai's ouster by a scheming GOSS VP Machar from his state SPLM chairmanship and its attendant political impact on the SPLM National Convention, and potentially the GOSS.

CONTINUED ISSUES WITH REDEPLOYMENT

¶2. (SBU) Competing claims over land north and south of the 1956 border and earlier SAF attempts to redeploy from the South, dismissed by Ajak as mere propaganda, have again heightened SPLA/SAF tensions within the oil field region. The SPLA Chief of Staff maintained that the SAF is consolidating its forces in the area, noting an expansive SAF presence stretching from Nuba Mountains to Heglig and Muglad. "They have at least three divisions of 35,000-plus troops - Nuba alone has 25,000," he claimed. (COMMENT: This assertion is hardly new, and remains increasingly difficult for UNMIS to verify or refute. END COMMENT). Ajak maintained that the SAF is intentionally strengthening its positions around the Korodad and Bentiu oil fields in order that Khartoum can continue to draw on their wealth even amidst a war with the South. "But they are making very wrong calculations," Ajak noted. The Charge countered that the SAF wants to reap the spoils of war without directly engaging in offensive combat. Ajak agreed, but noted "at the end of the day we will run out of patience, particularly if they keep moving to expand into territory we consider part of the South."

¶3. (SBU) Ajak reviewed the SPLA rationale for its recent withdrawal from Kharsana, citing lack of potable water and the town's compromised location far northeast of Abyei. The Chief of Staff allowed that there were six separate SAF units at varying positions behind the SPLA contingent, and that violence could have led to his soldiers' entrapment in a poor tactical position. Following the SPLA departure, SAF moved in to occupy the location despite advance discussions with the southern military and the Chief of Staff's understanding that the parties had reached a mutual restraint pact.

THE MISSERIYA: FRIEND OR FOE OR PRAGMATIST?

¶4. (SBU) Ongoing SPLA-Misseriya tensions were cast within the context of an "impoverished and backward local population similar to much of the South" effortlessly motivated by money and the lure of captured spoils. Ajak described a Baggara (Note: Baggara are cattle herding Arab tribes like the Misseriya and Southern Rizeigat) mentality that was perplexing to the point of absurdity. "The Baggara generally can be managed but it will take time, he

acknowledged." The Misseriya Emir of the group which attacked the SPLA one month prior outside Aweil is currently in Juba seeking to make up with the SPLM. He apologized for the attack, vowed to return the one SPLA Toyota Landcruiser captured during the skirmish, and pledged to return captured weapons as well. "How is it," the Chief of Staff laughed, "that these people can do the wrong thing one month and the right thing the next?"

15. (SBU) The SPLA has no easier a time managing its relations with Misseriya who wish to be integrated into its ranks. According to Ajak, the 2500-man "Debaab Force" (local militia who joined the SPLA in 2007) Misseriya outside of Bentiu now brought their own internal problems. The ill-trained, undisciplined militia group has been receiving pay and uniforms since joining the SPLA and assembling in Unity State. Malfeasance by some Misseriya pay-masters and officers has stoked intra-militia tensions. "Deserters that flee to their home areas are those same who return to the South to attack us," Ajak said. "The very same troops who begged to join our ranks not long ago." He noted that about 150 of these SPLA/Misseriya renegades had actually engaged in attacks against SPLA regular units. The Charge suggested that the SPLM aggressively reiterate their support for the Misseriya's unfettered access to grazing land in the South. Ajak responded that the point had been explained "very clearly" to the Misseriya in the past during Garang's stewardship of the military and after SPLM efforts during the Naivasha peace talks. "Because they are not united behind one or two voices, the message is not reaching all Baggara, and so they believe Khartoum went it attempts to manipulate them through claims that their land is being stolen by SPLA."

RIEK'S COUP IN UNITY STATE

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16. (SBU) The Charge turned to recent political fallout linked to Unity State Governor Taban Deng Gai's ouster from his state chairman seat, and drew a blunt response from the Chief of Staff. "It's Riek, and although I don't know what's precisely in his mind, the move was mostly about gaining power for his wife" (Angelina Teny Machar, GNU State Minister for Energy and Mines) and greater money and power for the both of them. Ajak described a classic Machar power play whereby the GOSS Vice President duped avaricious and pliable ex-Southern Sudan Defense Force Commander Paulino Matiep and titular SPLA Deputy Chief of Staff into believing that Matiep protege and GOSS Health Minister Joseph Monytiel Wiejang would generate larger kick-backs to the ailing commander. Ajak maintained that Taban Deng Gai fed Matiep a steady stream of cash to keep his Nuer followers in check during repeated clan-based political infighting in Unity State. The Chief of Staff remarked "Paulino takes money with no accountability, and he believes Riek when he is told that he the SPLM State Chairman will automatically become the governor. So he expects even more money from Monytiel."

17. (SBU) Vice President Machar's takeover of the state congress, Ajak complained, "was done in a very crude and primitive way." The Chief of Staff noted that Machar's attempts to unseat Gai encompassed last two years, and has involved anything ranging from local-level political insubordination to death threats. GOSS President Kiir has remained a steadfast ally of Gai throughout, noting to both Machar and his wife Angelina Teny in the past that despite complaints in the media and elsewhere, he believed Gai was doing well and that if such threats continued he would order the SPLA to protect the governor.

18. (SBU) For the Unity State Congress, the Vice President brought two platoons of seventy-five soldiers with him, and set to work intimidating convention-goers, delegates, and the congress supervisor alike. (NOTE: Each state congress has supervisors, senior SPLM members from outside that state that oversee the proceedings, file reports to Kiir in his capacity as party chairman and can step in to address irregularities. END NOTE.) Ajak believed that the May 10 Interim National Council meeting, the last before the historic National Convention, would likely review Taban Deng Gai's allegations that Machar had manipulated the congress's outcome.

Ajak contends that Machar exercised his status as Vice Chairman of the SPLM to block Gai's right as governor to nominate five percent of the state's delegates - a standing party rule and something which would have pushed the Governor into the victory column during the vote count. (COMMENT: Instead, Machar's move places the Government of Southern Sudan closer to crisis. If Monytiel's victory is preserved, he will have to resign his cabinet seat, leaving the GOSS with two vacant ministerial slots to fill. END COMMENT.)

19. (SBU) COMMENT: A relaxed and expansive General Oyai Deng Ajak seemed unaffected by the recent loss of his ostensible boss, SPLA Affairs Minister Dim Deng who died in a plane crash on May 2. His distressing depiction of infighting and intrigue in the ranks of the SPLA and SPLM rings true and shows how power in Sudan, whether North or South, always balances on the blade of a knife as allies squabble and undermine each other despite the threat from the NCP. His detailed description of Riek Machar's machinations bodes ill for Southern peace and unity as sooner or later the ambitious Riek will overreach and have to be slapped down by Salva Kiir.

FERNANDEZ